



**Austin/Travis County  
Animal Services Office  
1156 W. Cesar Chavez St.  
Austin, Texas 78703**



**M E M O R A N D U M**

**TO: Mayor and Council**

**FROM: Abigail Smith, Chief Animal Services Officer**

**DATE: September 7, 2011**

**SUBJECT: Animal Transfer to Houston SPCA**

On Monday, September 5, 2011 there were communications between local ASPCA representatives and the Houston SPCA (HSPCA) regarding possible assistance in light of the wildfires affecting Bastrop and Travis Counties. According to officials in the organization, the HSPCA has been experiencing a high volume of adoptions and as a result was prepared to transfer as many as 60 animals from the Austin area. Arrangements were made for a transport vehicle to come to Austin on Tuesday, September 6, 2010. Austin Animal Services was not in a space crisis and did not put out a plea for help; while we are assisting persons and animals affected by the fires, most of that work is in the field. Austin Animal Services viewed the transfer as a good will gesture from a sister city and a proactive measure in anticipation of what strain the days ahead could put on our resources. Furthermore, partnerships are a critical part of achieving live outcomes and I personally saw this as a way to establish a relationship with another agency that could potentially benefit from the model Austin has put in place.

A total of 16 cats and 3 dogs were loaded on to the HSPCA transport vehicle on Tuesday late afternoon. The 19 animals chosen for transport were the most adoptable animals in the TLAC shelter and the HSPCA anticipated placement of all Austin animals within 48 hours. The arrangement between Austin Animal Services and the HSPCA was that any animal not adopted within ten days would return to TLAC for placement. No animals from Austin were ever at risk for euthanasia.

Word of the transfer made its way to animal activists who immediately opposed the move, citing HSPCA as a "high kill" shelter. The HSPCA currently has a 68% live release rate, and as the best equipped organization in the state, handles many disaster responses and cruelty cases. The situation escalated to the point that during a phone conversation between Patty Mercer, HSPCA President and staff, the decision was made by HSPCA to return the animals to TLAC. Ms. Mercer indicated that their attempt to help appeared to be causing more harm than good. At approximately 5:00 PM the HSPCA transport vehicle arrived back at TLAC.

Animal Services is committed to saving the lives of animals and works to ensure that any rescue partnerships entered in to are with organizations that have the lives of animals as their foremost concern. Although we see everyone as a potential partner in our goal of increasing live outcomes, we

will ensure that any agency we partner with is also committed to the live outcome of our community's animals.

Should more information be needed, please do not hesitate to ask.

Cc: Marc A. Ott, City Manager  
Bert Lumbreras, Assistant City Manager